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MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH STATISTICS IN NORTH CAROLINA OVER THE LAST DECADE

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Introduction

North Carolina routinely collects information on maternal characteristics that are known risk factors for conditions associated with fetal, neonatal and postneonatal deaths. These maternal risk characteristics are derived from information recorded on birth certificates and include young and old age, low educational status, out of wedlock, high parity, a previous fetal death or a child born alive but who is now dead (1). Other factors which are not routinely collected but which are known to play important roles in birth outcome include genetic factors, environmental factors (for example, exposures to various toxins in the atmosphere or food) and infectious diseases. There are, no doubt, many others. Therefore, many questions of interest to health officials concerned with fetal, neonatal and postneonatal mortality cannot be answered on the basis of routinely recorded birth and death data but rather require in-depth special studies. However, many questions can be examined on the basis of these data. In particular, it is incumbent upon health officials to periodically examine the known recorded maternal characteristics that have traditionally been associated with risk to deliveries in order to see if the risks are changing and, if so, in what direction, and to see if the distribution of risk characteristics among delivering women changes, and, if so, how. Also, questions regarding risk in various regions of the state may be answered from these data.

The following definitions apply to this study:

Live Birth - A live birth is the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of human conception, irrespective of the duration of pregnancy, which, after such expulsion or extraction, breathes or shows any other evidence of life, whether or not the umbilical cord has been cut.

Fetal Death - A fetal death (stillbirth) is death prior to complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of the product of conception. This report shows only registered fetal deaths of 20 or more weeks gestation that were not recorded as abortions.

Neonatal Death - A neonatal death is the death of a liveborn child under 28 days of age. This report shows only matched neonatal deaths. A matched neonatal death is one which is matched with a birth certificate.

Postneonatal Death - A postneonatal death is the death of a liveborn child of 28 days to one year of age. Only matched postneonatal deaths are displayed in this report. A matched postneonatal death is one which is matched with a birth certificate.